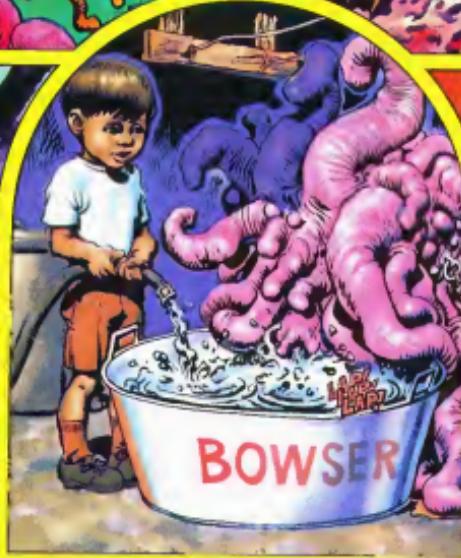
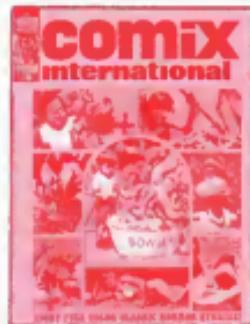


comix international



EIGHT FULL COLOR CLASSIC HORROR STORIES!



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CONTENTS

ISSUE NO. FIVE
1977

BOWSER Little Timmy didn't mind Bowser eating the rats and stray dogs but then it began to devour people. Timmy's folks knew that unless Bowser could be taught that the neighbors were a No-No it was sleep time!

THE SUCCUBUS STONE This case baffled detective Matheson. Young men were shriveling and dying of old age. The only clue Matheson could find which linked the deaths together was the glowing stone.

CORPSE WITH MISSING MIND Pendragon's old friend, the multi-millionaire Henderson Hunt, had passed away. Then at the funeral Pendy and Vampi are told of a mindless cadaver and a cadaverless grave!

THE MUMMY! . . . AND AN END Jerome Curry was trapped within the fetid, decaying body of the Mummy while some other man pranced about in his body. Curry became angry and his anger had no limitations!

DEJA VU When Janet Becker agreed to undergo hypnosis she couldn't have realized her session would take her back to a time where her ancestor was executed for a witch. Or was it her descendant and who was cursed?

DEMONS OF FATHER PAIN The demons, Belial and friends, had been set free to steal and murder. Whoever possessed the matching bracelet was responsible for the creatures. The trail pointed to the church!

THE ORIGIN OF THE SPIRIT His name was Denny Colt and his profession was police investigation. But he had to die so that THE SPIRIT could be created. A law enforcer not even the underworld could kill!

IN DEEP They were adrift upon the sea, clinging to a life preserver, clutching to life. The sea, the sharks, the gulls wanted her body but he wouldn't let them have her. He fought and in the end, won . . . in a way.

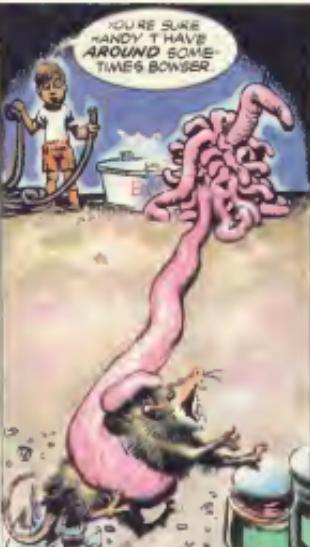
BOWSER

GETTIN' HARD
T FIND STRAYS IN
THIS NEIGHBORHOOD
BOWSER, HOPE YA
DON'T MIND COLD
MEAT ONCE IN
A WHILE.

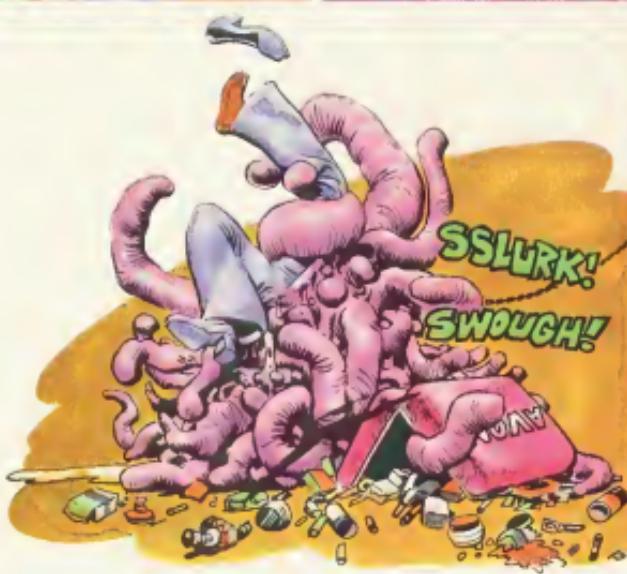
ILL DO WHAT
I CAN, BUT I AIN'T
PROMISIN' NOTHIN'. I GOT
LUCKY TONIGHT, BUT SOME-
TIMES I LOOK FOR HOURS
WITHOUT FINDIN' A
THING. IT'S TAKIN' UP
ALL MY TIME.

BOWSER

CRASH!









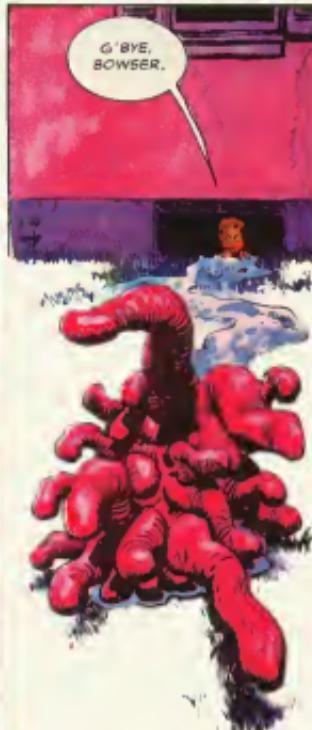




LATER THAT NIGHT...



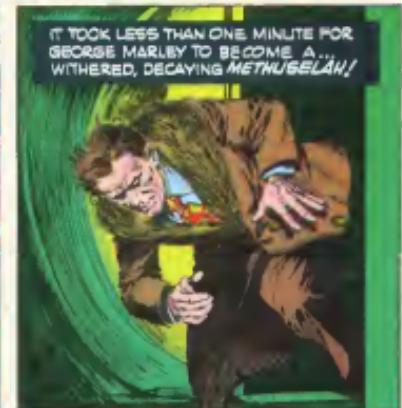
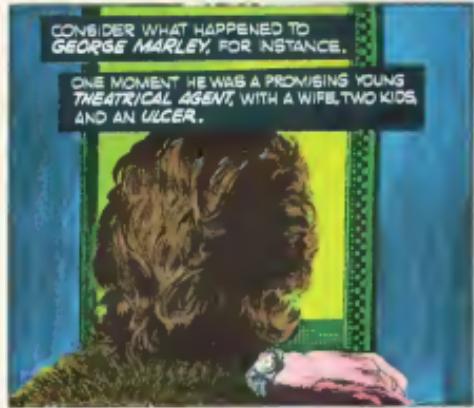
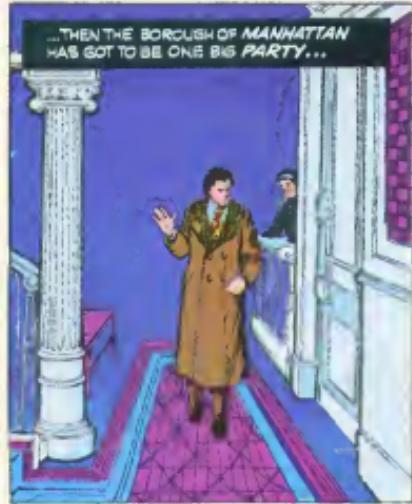
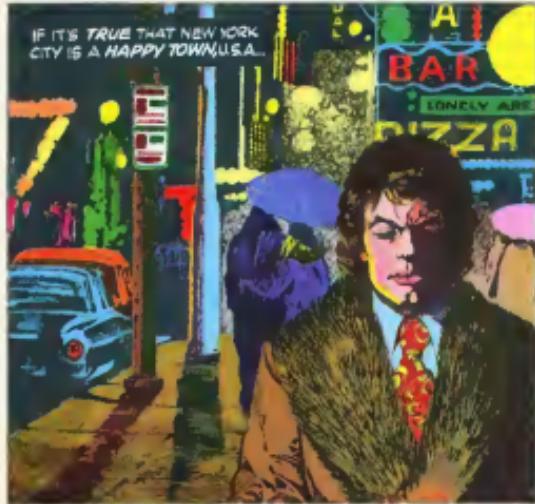
LATER THAT NIGHT...



WELL, IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS WHAT'S HAPPENED, TIM, AND IT'S ONLY GOING TO MAKE THINGS HARDER FOR ALL OF US! NOW WE HAVE TO FIND BOWSER! AND THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT HE'S DONE DURING THE NIGHT.



PROLOGUE



AGATHA MILHALIS DISCOVERED THE BODY IN THE HALLWAY AT 12:16 a.m.

DETECTIVE CHRISTOPHER MATHESON, EIGHTH PRECINCT, WAS MOST UNHAPPY TO RECEIVE THE CALL. HE DIDN'T PARTICULARLY LIKE MURDERS AT 12:16 a.m.

NOT THAT THEY APPEALED TO HIM AT OTHER TIMES OF DAY, BUT AFTER MIDNIGHT HE HAD TO DEAL WITH ROONEY HOFFMAN, THE ASSISTANT MEDICAL EXAMINER.

AND HOFFMAN WAS A PAIN IN A PLACE MATHESON DIDN'T LIKE TO HAVE PAINS.



THE SUCCUBUS STONE



I FOUND IT IN THE
DEAD MAN'S
POCKET!

EVER
SEEN ANYTHING
LIKE IT BEFORE?



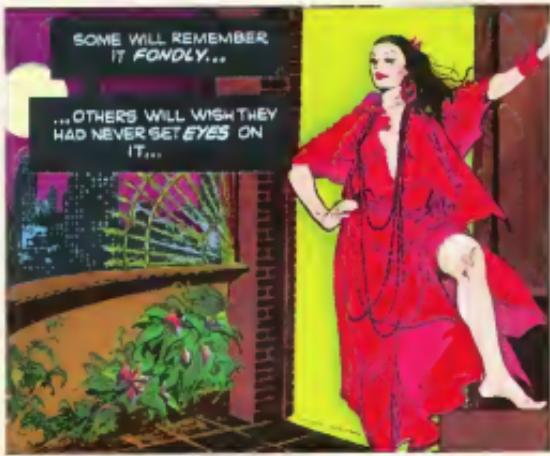
IF THE CITY IS INDEED A **HAPPY TOWN**,
U.S.A., IT ATTRACTS MANY FUN-SEEKERS.
SOME IT HAS TREATED **GENTLY**, OTHERS
SHE HAS **SEDUCED** AND **ABANDONED...**



NO, SEND IT DOWN
TO THE LAB FOR LATENT
PRINTS.

SOME WILL REMEMBER
IT **FONDLY...**

... OTHERS WILL WISH THEY
HAD NEVER SET EYES ON
IT...



... BUT NONE WILL **DENY** THAT IT IS
PERHAPS THE MOST **MYSTERIOUS**
PLACE IN THE WHOLE WORLD.

DOES
THE SELECTION
PLEASE YOU,
MR. HUNTER?



CERTAINLY, MADAME GOVAN.
AH DON'T SUHLLIEVE AH'VE
SEEN FINNUH LOOKIN' WIMMIN
IN ALL MAH DAYS!

WOULD YOU
CARE FOR SOME
SHERRY
FIRST?

IF YO' CHOICE IN
LUKKER EQUALS YO'
CHOICE IN WIMMIN'...
AH SHO' WOULD!



HUNTER SMILED. THE SOUTHERN DRAWL ALWAYS
BROUGHT THEM TO THEIR KNEES, EVEN IF IT WAS
AS PHONY AS ME.

WHY THEN WAS IT HUNTER
WHO PITCHED SUDDENLY TO
THE PLUSH CARPETING,
UNCONSCIOUS?

SIMPLY, HIS DRINK HAD
BEEN DRUGGED.



AT THAT MOMENT, CHRISTOPHER MATHESON DIDN'T KNOW OR CARE ANYTHING ABOUT CLAUDE HUNTER. HE HAD OTHER PROBLEMS.

HOW MANY TIMES MUST I TELL YOU? NINETY IS THE ROUTE NUMBER, NOT THE SPEED LIMIT!

THE LAB BOYS CHECKED THE STONE, MATT. NOTHING, NOT EVEN MARLEY'S PRINTS!

DOESN'T THAT STRIKE YOU AS A LITTLE ODD, KOLCHINSKY?

ABOUT THE STONE, SIR?

NO, ABOUT THE PRINTS!

NO CEDER THAN A MAN AGING YEARS BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SEVENTEENTH FLOORS.

ONE THING THAT MIGHT HELP...WE TALKED TO MARLEY'S BUSINESS ASSOCIATES.

LOOKS LIKE HIS WIFE WAS RIGHT! THEY SAY HE FREQUENTS A MIDTOWN "MASSAGE PARLOR..."

...A PLACE RUN BY A MADAME GOVAY!

THREE MINUTES BEFORE MIDNIGHT, CLAUDE HUNTER COULDN'T REMEMBER WHAT HE HAD DONE FOR THE PAST FEW HOURS, BUT HE HOPED HE HAD A GOOD TIME.

AS HE LEFT, IT OCCURRED TO HIM THAT THE ONLY OTHER PEOPLE ON THE STREETS AT THIS HOUR WERE HOOKERS AND MUGGERS.

HE COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER...

...WERE THE HOOKERS BEING MUGGED?
OR WERE THE MUGGERS BEING HOOKED?



CHARLES CORNWALL HAD BEEN A BUS DRIVER FOR FORTY YEARS. HE COMPLAINED ABOUT THE JOB FOR THIRTY- NINE YEARS AND ELEVEN MONTHS.

BUT WHEN IT CAME RIGHT DOWN TO IT...

...HE RATHER LIKED HIS ROLE AS A PASSIVE MARTYR.

HEY MAC...
THIS IS THE LAST STOP!
YOU PLANNIN' TO GO HOME WITH ME OR WHAT?

HE WAS USED TO HAVING DRUNKS ABOARD. IN FACT, HE WAS ALMOST GRATEFUL FOR THEM, FOR THEY GAVE HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO STOP DRIVING FOR A MOMENT AND EXERT A LITTLE AUTHORITY.

HE WAS NOT USED TO HAVING DEAD MEN ABOARD, HOWEVER!

HEY, WAKE UP...
OH MY GOD!

CHRISTOPHER MATHESON KNEW, EVEN BEFORE THE CALL CAME IN, THAT THIS WASN'T GOING TO BE A GOOD NIGHT. HE SENSED IT THE SAME WAY HIS GRANDMOTHER COULD SENSE TOMORROW'S WEATHER BY THE WAY HER ARTHRITIS BEHAVED...

FOURTY YEARS
I BEEN DRIVIN' THIS BUS AND NOTHIN' LIKE THIS EVER HAPPENED BEFORE!

I GET A LOTTA DRUNKS ON THIS ROUTE, Y'KNOW? I THOUGHT HE WAS ONE'A THEM!

CAN YOU TELL US WHERE HE BOARDED THE BUS, MR. CORNWALL?

CORNER OF GROVER AND THORNTON STREETS!

THAT'S RIGHT
OUTSIDE MADAME GOWAY'S PLACE!

AND HOW
WOULD YOU
KNOW THAT?

WELL...
I...ER.../

EXCUSE ME!
I FOUND ANOTHER
STONE ON YOUR
LATEST CORPSE.

NEXT TO PAPER WORK, STAKEOUTS HAVE TO BE THE DULLEST PART OF POLICE ROUTINE. SO WHEN CHRISTOPHER MATHESON STOOD ON THE CORNER OF GROVER AND THORNTON THE FOLLOWING NIGHT...

...HE HAD A LOT OF TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHY HE NEVER BECAME A DOCTOR LIKE HIS MOTHER ALWAYS SUGGESTED.



BUT IF MATHESON KNEW WHAT WAS OCCURRING INSIDE THE PENTHOUSE, HE'D HAVE HAD FAR BETTER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

TONIGHT IS THE THIRD AND FINAL NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON FOR THIS MONTH.

ONCE AGAIN, WE MUST PERFORM THE RITE



ACCORDING TO LEGEND, SUCUBI ARE DEMONS WHO MATE WITH MORTAL MEN...

...TO DRAW THE LIFE AND VITALITY FROM THEIR VICTIMS...



...SO THAT THEIR OWN LIVES MAY BE ETERNALLY PRESERVED...

THE EXACT POWERS THAT ENABLED THEIR KIND TO THRIVE WERE MYSTERIOUS AND UNKNOWN!

EVEN MADAME GOVAY HAD NOT TOLD THE GIRLS ALL THEY KNEW...



...WAS THAT CONCENTRATED WALL POWER, FILTERED THROUGH THE MYSTERIOUS STONE AT PRECISELY MIDNIGHT...



...MADE THEM YOUNGER... MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN THEY ALREADY WERE!



OUTSIDE, CHRISTOPHER MATHESON WONDERED IF HE COULD STILL APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOL AT THIRTY-SIX YEARS OF AGE!



MATHESON KNEW IT WAS A LONG SHOT. HE WASN'T EVEN CERTAIN THE BOY HAD GONE TO MADAME GOVAY'S PLACE...

THEN A CLOCK IN THE DISTANCE CHIMED MIDNIGHT...



...AND MATHESON CURSED AS HE SAW HIS SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.

HE TURNED OLD BEFORE MY EYES! NOTHING MORE I CAN DO FOR HIM...

...EXCEPT FIND OUT HOW AND WHY! NOT THAT IT'LL MAKE HIM OR HIS KIN FEEL ANY BETTER!



MATHESON CHARGED INTO MADAME GOVAY'S...

BOGART ALWAYS DID IT. SEAN CONNERY ALWAYS DID IT. SO DID A MILLION TV DETECTIVES!

SO WHY SHOULDN'T HE?

JUST THIS ONCE.

POLICE!
THIS IS A
RAID!

ONE MAN
PULLING A
RAID? YOU
ARE CRAZY!



WANNA
BET?

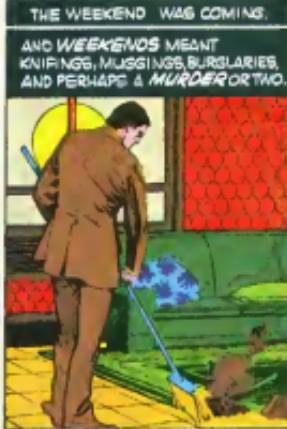
THE MADAME
AND HER LADIES
MUST BE IN
HERE... WAITING
FOR ME, NO
DOUBT!



MATHESON KNEW THAT WHATEVER ANSWER HE HOPED TO FIND, LAY IN THE BACK ROOM.

WHEN HE PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR, HE WASN'T AT ALL SHOCKED TO SEE A HAREM OF CAT-LIKE WOMEN LEERING AT HIM HATEFULLY.





THE Corpse With the MISSING MIND

... ASHES TO ASHES; DUST TO DUST. MAY HIS SOUL REST IN ETERNAL PEACE.

HE MUST HAVE BEEN A GOOD FRIEND TO YOU, PEN. I'M ONLY SORRY I NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO MEET HIM.

HE SAW ALMOST NO ONE IN HIS FINAL YEARS. MY CHILD HENDERSON HUNT WAS A TOTAL RECLUSE.



VAMPIRELLA

AS FOR FRIENDS,
HENDERSON HAD NO FRIENDS.
ONCE, WE WERE INSEPARABLE
BUT WHEN MONEY CAME TO MEAN
MORE TO HIM THAN PEOPLE, WE
WENT OUR SEPARATE WAYS.

AND THAT, MY DEAR,
WAS ALMOST FORTY
YEARS AGO...



ER... EXCUSE ME.
PERHAPS YOU
AREN'T THAT
ILLUSIONIST AND
VAUDEVILLIAN
EXTRAORDINAIRE...
THE GREAT
PENDRAGON?

I AM, SIR!
AND WHO--?
CHARLIE!?

CHARLIE
BOY, IS IT
YOU?

Pen... You old fox! How the devil **ARE** you? What have you been doing with yourself the past forty years?

SCRAPING
BY CHARLIE!
EAKING OUT
A LIVING IN THE
ILLUSIONISTIC
ARTS!

OH, I'M SORRY
CHARLIE... I'D LIKE
YOU TO MEET MY
ASSISTANT... A
CHARMING WENCH OF
MULTIPLE TALENTS...
VAMPYRELLA!

VAMPS, SAY HELLO TO **CHARLIE JUGGLES**... FRIEND, CONFIDANT AND CONSTANT COMPANION FOR THE LAST HALF CENTURY TO HENDERSON HUNT

CHARMED,
MY DEAR.

IT'S HARD TO
BELIEVE H.H. IS FINALLY
GONE. I'VE ALWAYS
THOUGHT LEGENDS
LIVED FOREVER!

WERE YOU THERE
AT THE END,
CHARLIE?

I WAS... AND
IT'S A STRANGE
TALE, PEN.

COME, LET ME DROP
YOU WHERE YOU'RE STAYING
AND I'LL TELL YOU THE
WHOLE STORY.

YOU'VE AROUSED MY
CURIOSITY, MR. JUGGLES. WHAT
WAS SO STRANGE ABOUT
HENDERSON HUNT'S **DEATH**?
THE MEDIA REPORTED HE DIED
OF A STROKE!

HE WAS THE RICHEST MAN IN THE
WORLD... AND ONE OF THE
MOST CUNNING.

AND HE'S PROBABLY THE ONLY
MAN EVER TO CHEAT **DEATH**!

HE WAS THE GREATEST PUPPETEER
WHO EVER LIVED, MY DEAR. HE PULLED
PEOPLE'S STRINGS AND MANIPULATED
THEM AT WILL.

HE HAD PEOPLE THINKING
WHATEVER HE WANTED
THEM TO THINK!

THAT'S WHAT
MR. HUNT WANTED
THE PUBLIC TO THINK,
MISS...

AND WHAT
HENDERSON HUNT
WANTED HE ALWAYS
OBTAINED.



WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, CHARLIE? T-THAT HENDERSON ISN'T DEAD?

I... I'VE GOT TO TELL YOU! YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN WHO WILL BELIEVE ME! H-HENDERSON ISN'T IN THAT GRAVE, PEN!

I... I'M NOT SURE WHERE HE IS. THE LAST I SAW OF HIM WAS ONE WEEK AGO. HE LOOKED LIKE DEATH WARMED OVER."

"HE WAS SO WEAK, RUN DOWN, HE HAD CHASED HIM TO THE EDGE OF HIS GRAVE, AND WAS PUSHING HARD TO SHOVE HIM IN!"



HENDERSON KNEW THE END WAS NEAR. HE ORDERED ME TO READY HIS JET FOR IT'S FINAL FLIGHT. HE WANTED TO GO HOME... TO DIE IN HIS NATIVE TEXAS.



"I FLEW THE PLANE FROM ACAPULCO TO HOUSTON WHILE H.H., I THOUGHT, SLEPT IN THE REARWARD CABIN."

"BUT WHEN I LANDED THAT BIRD ON TEXAS SOIL, AND WENT TO HELP HENDERSON DISEMBARK... I FOUND... I FOUND... A NIGHTMARE!"



"HIS BRAIN AND HIS EYES HAD BEEN CUT OUT OF HIS SKULL!"

OH, MY GOD!

IT WAS HORRIBLE. I RADIODIED THE TOWER MR. HUNT HAD EXPIRED IN MID-FLIGHT. I ORDERED A COFFIN DELIVERED TO THE JET.

HE FALSIFIED THE DEATH CERTIFICATE, CLAIMING H.H. HAD DIED OF A STROKE.

THE COFFIN WAS SEALED AND NO ONE WAS THE WISER...

B-BUT I SWEAR TO YOU, PEN... I... I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BOSS WHILE I WAS PILOTING THAT PLANE!

NO ONE SAW THE BODY EXCEPT MR. HUNT'S PHYSICIAN WHO WAS AS SHOCKED AS I AT THE CONDITION OF THE BOSS' CORPSE.

THUD!

W-WHO COULD HAVE STOLEN A MAN'S BRAIN... AND WHY--? MUH?

PEN! LOOK! G-GAS! CHOKED! BLACKING OUT! COUGH!

SOME TIME LATER, TWO DROWSY FIGURES STAR... AND SLOWLY REGAIN STUNNED, SLEEPY SENSES.

P-PEN!
A-ARE YOU
ALRIGHT?

V-VAMPI...
W-WHERE
ARE WE?

I'M NOT SURE
THE LAST THING
I REMEMBER
IS THE CAR...
THE GAS!

CHARLIE!
WHERE'S
CHARLIE? WHAT'S
HAPPENED TO
HIM?

IF WE FIND
OUT WHERE WE
ARE... JUST MAYBE
WE'LL BE ABLE TO
FIND YOUR FRIEND...

T-THOSE
LIGHTS-!

AGHHH!

SO BRIGHT...
W-WHERE ARE
THEY COMING
FROM?

OH MY GOD
WOOD!

OH LORDY... I
SWEAR I HAVEN'T
TOUCHED A DROP ALL
MORNING! W-WHY IS
THIS HAPPENING
TO ME?

EITHER WE'RE
UPSIDE DOWN... OR
THIS ROOM IS.

HI HO!
HI HO! IT'S
OFF TO PLAY
WE GO!

LOOK,
MATEYS! IT'S
A WOMAN!
HE! HE!

HA-HA-HA!
ME AINT SEEN A
LADY SINCE SNOW
LOST HER
WHITENESS!
HE! HOO!

HA! HA! IT'S
MORE FUN THAN
PLAYIN' IN THE MINE
FIELDS EH, ME
LADIES?

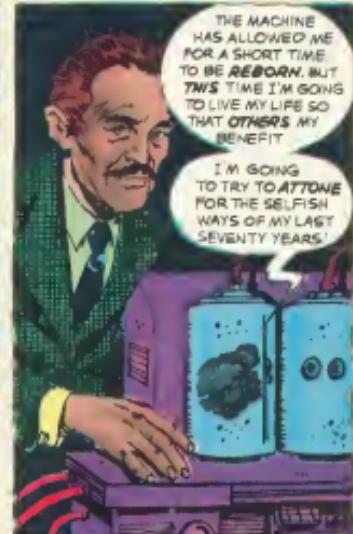
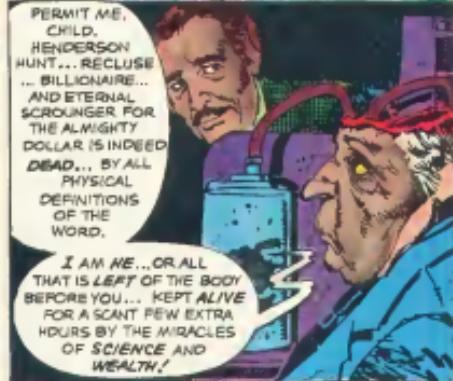
HANDS OFF,
O'SULLIVAN... THAT
CHUNK O' ER IS
MINE!

PENNNN--!









PEN, OLD FRIEND... YOU AND MY LOYAL CHARLES ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE IN A LIFETIME THAT I HAVE EVER CALLED MY FRIENDS!

THE THREE OF US STUDIED ILLUSIONARY TOGETHER. WE SHARED THE BEST OF TIMES, WE SHARED THE WORST OF TIMES. WE WERE PEANUTLESS THEN... BUT WE ALWAYS HAD OUR COMPANIONSHIP!

WHEN MY FATHER DIED AND LEFT ME HIS HOLDINGS, I... I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU TURNED AWAY FROM ME, OLD FRIEND. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THEN WHY YOU DIDN'T WANT TO HELP ME IN MY PURSUIT GREATER WEALTH.

I KNEW YOU WERE DISGUSTED BY MY SUDDEN MATERIALISM... BUT I BECAME SO OBSESSED WITH ACCUMULATING DIRTY GREEN PAPER THAT I DIDN'T CARE WHAT YOU OR THE REST OF THE WORLD THOUGHT.

AND THEN, I BEGAN THINKING OF YOU, MY FRIEND, OF HOW YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO HAD TRULY LIVED A FULL LIFE.

YOU PURSUED WHAT CHARLES AND I ABANDONED. YOU WENT ON TO ENTERTAIN PEOPLE... TO MAKE THEM HAPPY!

YOU DID IT WELL, PEN... AND YOU'VE MADE CHARLES AND ME PROUD!

YOU WERE THE FIRST, PEN. YOU'VE BEEN THE FIRST PERSON TO PLAY IN MY AMUSEMENT PARADISE, A-AND I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW... FRIEND, THAT I'VE BUILT IT FOR YOU, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE!



THIS IS THE GATEWAY TO WONDERLAND

IT CAME TO ME, PEN SOMETHING I HAD FORGOTTEN **FOURTY YEARS AGO**. I REMEMBERED HOW YOU, CHARLES AND I USED TO TALK ABOUT OPENING A WONDERLAND... A PLACE OF MAGIC AND DREAMS, WHERE PEOPLE COULD COME TO FORGET THEIR TROUBLES.



TOMORROW, WONDERLAND WILL OPEN TO THE WORLD. IT WILL BE **FREE**... **TOTALLY FREE**... AND THERE WILL BE **OTHER** WONDERLANDS OPENING IN ALL THE COUNTRIES THAT NEED THEM MOST!

IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME HENDERSON HUNT HAS EVER **LOST** MONEY ON A VENTURE...



I NEVER CARED, PEN... EVEN IN MY LONELY HOURS OF SOLITUDE... NEVER, UNTIL THE END.

I REMEMBERED, PEN, TOO LATE... IN MY FINAL MOMENTS. I REMEMBERED AN I VOWED I WOULD SEE THAT DREAM BECOME REALITY!

A-AND YOU HAVE, MR. HUNT... T-THAT YOU HAVE!

AND IT'S BEAUTIFUL!

THIS IS THE GATEWAY TO WONDERLAND

...BUT Y'KNOW SOMETHING, MY FRIENDS... IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER TRULY BEEN HAPPY.



PROLOGUE

AND AN END CAME HERE. AT THE BEGINNING POINT, A FEW FEET DOWN IN GRITTY HOT SAND... IN A TOMBING SARCOPHAGUS OF WEATHERED WORMWOOD...

AND YOU, JEROME CURRY, WERE YET TRAPPED WITHIN THE CORPSE OF THE MUMMY! BUT YOU CAN'T CARE NOW. NOT NOW. IT HAD ALL BEEN SO VERY WRONG!



AND WHAT OF THE AMULET? HOW HAD YOU LOST IT? CARELESSNESS NO... THIEVES? THEY STOLE IT FROM YOU AND IT WAS QUICKLY LOST IN A SEA OF HANDS... AND TIME.

CAN YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST FOUND IT? WHEN IT FIRST CAME INTO YOUR POSSESSION? YOU COULD NEVER KNOW IT WOULD DESTROY YOU!

YET, WAS IT PURE ILL-PROVIDENCE THAT TORTURED YOU TO DEATH? WERE YOU BUT AN INNOCENT VICTIM OF THE AMULET?



BY GOD! THE AMULET! ALL THESE YEARS OF READING ABOUT THE TREASURED AMULET OF THE EGYPTIANS... I NEVER DREAMED I WOULD POSSESS IT!

AND NOW... IT IS LOST TO ME! AND I'M IMPRISONED BY ITS FOUL POWER!

WAS YOUR CURSE DECREED BY FATE, JEROME? OR WAS IT YOUR OWN GREED... YOUR OWN SICKNESS FOR POWER THAT HAD CAUSED YOUR UNDOING?

THE MUMMY?

YES...YOUR DOWNFALL. YOU'LL NEVER FORGET HOW IT ENDED, WILL YOU, JEROME...? YOU'LL FOREVER REMEMBER THE PAIN...THE FLAMES EATING AWAY AT THE WITHERED HUSK YOU OCCUPIED! YOU'LL NEVER FORGET HOW HELPLESS YOU FELT?

THEY GATHERED AROUND YOU... LIKE A PACK OF BLOODLUSTING JACKALS BRINGING DOWN A WOUNDED CALF! THEY THREW TORCHES! THEY BURNED YOU... TO DEATH!

YOU COULDN'T MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND ALL YOU WANTED WAS TO BE LEFT ALONE IN YOUR MISERY. YOU'D ALREADY SEALED YOUR OWN DOOM. YOU WERE THE WALKING DEAD SEARCHING FOR A PLACE TO ROT IN PEACE.

BUT THEY DIDN'T GIVE YOU ANY PEACE, DID THEY? IT WAS AS IF THEY KNEW THE EVIL OF YOUR SING...THE MANY YOU MURDERED FOR THE THRILL AS YOU HID IN THE WRACKINGS OF A MAN THREE THOUSAND YEARS UNDEAD.

...AND
AN END!

THE AMULET! THAT WAS YOUR DOWNFALL. THE DAMNED AMULET! NO, THOSE DAMNED THIEVES...! OR, NO...PERHAPS IT WAS ALL OF YOUR OWN CREATION! AND THE FIRE BURNED YOUR GUILT INTO YOUR SOUL FOR ETERNITY.

YOU KILLED YOURSELF, FOOL! YOU KILLED YOURSELF!

YOUR INSTINCTS, OR PERHAPS THE INSTINCTS OF THE DISGUSTING BODY YOU OCCUPIED, LED YOU BACK TO THE TOMB. YOU DIDN'T KNOW FOR SURE... BUT YOU SENSED THE AMULET HAD FOUND ITS WAY BACK THERE.

YET, SOMEONE WAS THERE BEFORE YOU.

HE HAD ALREADY FOUND THE AMULET, AND SOMETHING MORE...!

THAT STRANGE NECKLACE I DISCOVERED YESTERDAY... I LOOKED IT UP, IF MY GUESS IS RIGHT, IT WILL GIVE THE POSSESSOR THE POWER TO TRANSFER HIS SOUL INTO THE BODY OF A DEAD MAN!

MERE SUPERSTITIOUS SPECULATION, STILL... IF I COULD TRANSFER INTO SOMEONE ELSE... WHO WOULD IT BE? ONE OF THESE BANDAGED STEPS? HMM?

CHARLES BENNING
WAS AN ARCHEOLOGIST REEXAMINING A TOMB SITE WHICH WAS CLOSED DOWN FIVE YEARS BEFORE DUE TO MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. HE WAS ENJOYING IT. HIS WIFE WAS DEPLORING IT, EQUALLY.

GOD, YOU GRAVE-DIGGING BORE! WHAT EXCITEMENT IS THERE IN WATCHING YOU DUST OFF SKULLS AND COFFINS!

NO REAL MAN WOULD NEVER IGNORE SOMEONE LIKE ME FOR A MUSKY PLACE SUCH AS THIS!

BUT, JANICE... YOU KNOW WHAT THIS TOMB COULD MEAN FOR US!

BORED OF THE HEAT
BORED OF SAND IN MY
NOSTRILS... SAND IN
MY HAIR...

I SUGGEST YOU'D BE HAPPY IF I WAS A DASHINGLY ROMANTIC GIBOLO!

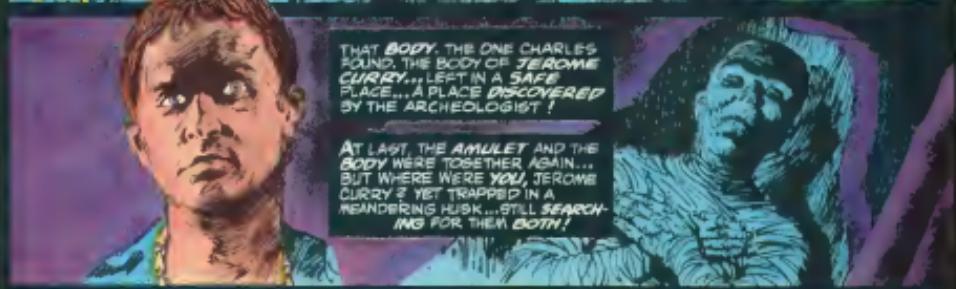
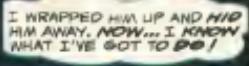
BUT THESE COLD ARTIFACTS BUY THOSE ENDLESS LUXURIES YOU CRAVE!

REJECTED AND DISGUSTED BY AN INATTENTIVE HUSBAND AND A MARRIAGE GONE FLAT, JANICE BOILED OVER WITH PENT UP SAVAGERY!

HEY! YOU LITTLE MAGGOT! WHAT'RE YOU DOING IN MY TENT? YOU MISERABLE THIEF!

MY HUSBAND'S RELICS! I TOLD CHARLES I WAS GOING TO KILL THE NEXT THIEVING NATIVE I CAUGHT PLUNDERING OUR POSSESSIONS!

JANICE!
STOP!
DON'T HURT HER!



AT LAST THE AMULET AND THE BODY WERE TOGETHER AGAIN... BUT WHERE WERE YOU, JEROME CURRY? YET TRAPPED IN A MEANDERING HUSK... STILL SEARCHING FOR THEM BOTH!

WASN'T PROF. MIDERMAN SURPRISED WHEN A HANDSOME YOUNG "STRANGER" FOUND HIS WAY INTO CAMP JUST AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CHARLES BENNING? BUT, OF COURSE, YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT WAS HAPPENING, DID YOU, JEROME? YOUR HANDSOME BODY WAS NOW HARBORING THE MIND AND SOUL OF A PLAIN LITTLE MAN... WHO WANTED SIMPLY TO LIVE AGAIN.

WHAT'S THAT, YOUNG MAN? WHY YES, MATTER OF FACT WE COULD USE SOME HELP! OUR HEAD ARCHEOLOGIST TURNED UP MISSING JUST YESTERDAY.

AND YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT THIS TOMB SITE? HOW... FORTUNATE.

THEY NEVER EVEN MISSED POOR CHARLES BENNING. HOW COULD THEY WHEN THEY HAD HIS KNOWLEDGE INSIDE YOUR OWN STRIKINGLY HANDSOME, YOUNG BODY? BUT WHERE WERE YOU, JEROME?

NO, YOU COULDN'T KNOW ALL THAT, COULD YOU, JEROME? YOU WERE BUSY FOLLOWING YOUR INSTINCTS... TIREFLESSLY TREKKING ACROSS A BARE WASTELAND, LOOKING FOR YOUR AMULET... AND YOUR BODY. REMEMBER?



WITH THE EYES OF JEROME CURRY, CHARLES BENNING WATCHED HIS WIFE... OR WAS THAT EX-WIFE... CASTING HIM AN APPROVING EYE. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, HER GAZE STIRRED LONG DEAD COALS...

WELL MAKE THE ENTRY POINT THE EAST WALL HERE, GENTLEMEN. AND YOU, SIR, SINCE YOU ARE OUR NEWEST MEMBER, YOU HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF STRIKING THE FIRST POST.

YES, I THINK WE'RE ALL GOING TO GET ALONG FAMOUSLY. PITTY CHARLES LEFT US! BUT I THINK WE'VE GAINED A MORE DYNAMIC PERSONAGE TO TAKE HIS PLACE!

WHY, THANK YOU, SIR.



THAT'S WHEN YOU FINALLY ARRIVED, ISN'T IT, JEROME? FOLLOWING SOME ANCIENT SENSE STILL LEFT IN THE DECAYED MUMMY YOU'VE OCCUPIED FOR SO LONG. THAT'S WHEN YOU CAME INTO THE VERY ROOM WHERE YOU HID YOUR BODY... THE ROOM WHERE THE AMULET HAD RETURNED TO WAIT FOR YOU. BUT YOU WERE SO SLOW.



YOU LOOKED FIRST FOR YOUR BODY.

THE AMULET! WHOEVER FOUND YOUR BODY ALSO FOUND THE AMULET! AND FOR SOME STRANGE REASON USED IT TO TAKE YOUR BODY, LEAVING THIS CLUMSY FORM AS A POOR SUBSTITUTE FOR YOUR OWN!



WHA-?? IT'S GONE! B-BUT A DIFFERENT BODY HAS BEEN LEFT IN ITS PLACE !

SOMEONE'S TAKEN MY BODY IN EXCHANGE FOR THIS ONE!

FIND THE AMULET! GET IT BACK! FIND YOUR BODY! GET BACK INTO IT AND RUN! RUN FAR, FAR AWAY FROM THIS NIGHTMARE YOU'VE LIVED FOR SO LONG, JEROME!



FEAR RUNS LIKE AN ICY RIVER THROUGH YOUR TRAPPED SOUL! BLEEDING, FESTERING FEAR, CRAWLING THROUGH YOUR BRAIN LIKE BURNING WORMS, SEND YOU MAD WITH RAGE! YOU RIP THE TOMB APART! THE AMULET MUST BE HERE! YOUR BODY TOO...

...BUT THEY ARE NOT!

DAMMIT TO HELL! IT CAN'T END LIKE THIS! IT CAN'T!

ERAK-CLOSSH!



FINALLY... YOU DID FIND SOMETHING, DIDN'T YOU, JEROME? THE THIEF! THE BODY STEALING GHOUl! AND YOU KNEW... HE MUST PAY!



BUT FOOL! NOT WITH HIS LIFE!

SHOFR!



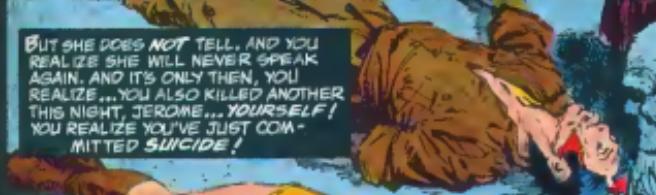
YET... YOU'RE TOO FAR GONE WITH HATRED AND FEAR TO COMPREHEND WHAT YOU'VE DONE!



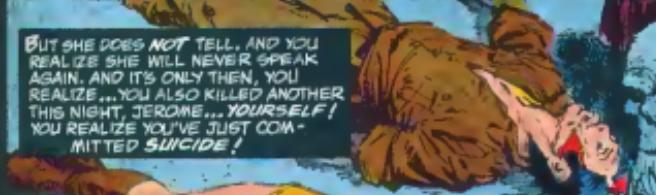
YOU CAN NOW ONLY THINK OF THE AMULET... AND THE GIRL!



MAKE HER TELL WHERE THE AMULET IS! MAKE HER!



BUT SHE DOES NOT TELL, AND YOU REALIZE SHE WILL NEVER SPEAK AGAIN. AND IT'S ONLY THEN, YOU REALIZE... YOU ALSO KILLED ANOTHER THIS NIGHT, JEROME... YOURSELF! YOU REALIZE YOU'VE JUST COMMITTED SUICIDE!



OH MY GOD! WHAT HAVE I DONE?

BUT THEN YOU REMEMBERED...THE MAN WHO STOLE YOUR BODY, LEFT HIS IN THE TOMB.

IF YOU CAN JUST FIND THE AMULET, YOU CAN TRANSFER INTO HIS BODY. AT LEAST IT'S A CHANCE TO LIVE!



BUT...IT'S TOO LATE, JEROME! FOR YOU...THE FINAL PAGES OF LIFE HAVE FINALLY BEEN WRITTEN!

THE CROWD! THEY SAW YOU! YOU TERRIFIED THEM! THEY HURLED TORCHES AT YOU AND THE FLAMES INSTANTLY ENGULFED THE PARCHED HUSK YOU OCCUPY.

THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, DID THEY JEROME?

THEY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT YOU NEVER MEANT THEM HARM...FOR YOU COULD NOT TELL THEM! YOU COULD NOT GET ANCIENT, ROTTING VOCAL CHORDS TO FUNCTION...



REMEMBER, JEROME? YOUR LEGS CEASED WORKING! THE MUMIFIED REMAINS DWINDLED IN THE FLAMES! AND YET YOU STRUGGLED... YOU CRAWLED...GREEDY, STUPID, MURDEROUS FOOL...IN ONE DESPERATE LUNGE, YOU REACHED TOWARDS YOUR SALVATION...!



THEN YOU REALIZED...YOU KNEW YOU WERE...DEAD. IT WAS OVER. YOU DIED JUST A FEW FEET FROM REDEMPTION! A FEW FEET!

AND AN END CAME HERE, BACK AT THE BEGINNING POINT. A FEW FEET DOWN IN GRITTY, HOT SAND...IN A TOMBING SARCOPHAGUS OF WEATHERED WORMWOOD.



AND THE LAST THING YOU HEAR IS YOUR OWN VOICE, SCREAMING INTO YOUR OWN SOUL..."YOU KILLED YOURSELF, FOOL! YOU KILLED YOURSELF!"

THE MUMMY'S FINAL VICTIM... WAS YOU!

THE PAIN. REMEMBER THAT HORRIBLE SEARING AGONY? THE FLAMES! THE FIRE! BUT LOOK! THERE! AROUND THAT LITTLE GIRL'S NECK!

THE SONOROUS PRONE OF HIS VOICE RELAXES YOU. JANET BECKER... LULLS YOU INTO AN IRRESISTABLE TRANCE.

WAVES OF UTTER TRANQUILITY WASH WARMLY OVER YOU. AND YOUR FINAL THOUGHT IS A QUESTION. YOU WONDER WHY YOU VOLUNTEERED TO BE A SUBJECT OF PRE-NATAL HYPNOSIS!



"I... I WAS SOMEONE ELSE THEN... LIKE MYSELF... BUT IN A DIFFERENT TIME AND... ANOTHER PLACE! MY NAME WASN'T JANET BECKER... I WAS PRISCILLA STARKER... I AND I LIVED ALONE... IN SALEM... EXCEPT FOR POOR KITTY. SHE WAS MY ONLY COMPANY. HER WITH ONE EYE... AND ME WITH MY PARENTS LONG IN THEIR GRAVES!"



"A-AND THEN... THAT FINAL EVENING! THEY CAME... WHILE I WAS PREPARING BROTH FOR MY DINNER! THE THREE PILGRIMS BURST INTO MY HOME... A-AND I WAS TERRIFIED!"

"YOU'RE A WITCH, PRISCILLA STARKER!"



"THE MEN GRABBED ME THEN... DRAGGED ME FROM MY HOME... A-AND SET TORCH TO MY CABIN WHILE POOR KITTY WAS YET LOCKED WITHIN!"



"A-AND EVEN AS THE PYRE RAGED, THEY DRAGGED ME TO THE VILLAGE... TO A STAKE RESERVED FOR THE BURNING OF WITCHES... A-AND THERE I WAS ACCUSED OF UNSPEAKABLE CRIMES AGAINST GOD!"



DEJA Vu

INCREDIBLE! HER STORY SUBSTANTIATES THE EXISTENCE OF REINCARNATION! HER PREVIOUS INCARNATION WAS THAT OF AN ACCUSED WITCH IN 17TH CENTURY SALEM!

YES, JANET! IT WAS HORRIBLE, BUT YOU'RE SAFE NOW! THINK OF IT ONLY AS A DREAM... AND TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR LIFE AS PRISCILLA STARKER.

"I REMEMBER THE HATRED IN THEIR EYES AS THEY PRESED THEIR ACCUSATIONS..."

JUDGE MATTHEW BECKER... ? CAN IT BE? MUST EXAMINE HER DOSSIER AND MAKE SURE!

REST NOW, JANET... DO NOT REMEMBER AGAIN UNTIL I COMMAND IT! THAT'S RIGHT... REST!

SHE SPEAKS WITH A ONE-EYED CAT. YOUR HONOR... CONVERSES WITH IT, AND HER CAULDRON IS BUSY EVERY NIGHT WITH VILE WITCH'S BREWS AND UNHOLY POTIONS!

I PREPARE NO POTIONS! JUST BROTH... FOR MY SUPPER!

MUST YE BE WARNED AGAINST WITCH? I, JUDGE MATTHEW BECKER, SHALL DECIDE WHAT YE WERE BREWING IN YOUR FOUL CAULDRON!

THIS IS UNCANNY! HER GENEALOGICAL RECORDS INDICATE THAT SHE DID HAVE AN ANCESTOR, IN SALEM IN THE 17TH CENTURY! A JUDGE MATTHEW BECKER... INFAMOUS FOR HIS WITCH TRIALS!

JANET IS HIS PRESENT-DAY DESCENDANT, YET... INCREDIBLE... SHE HERSELF WAS ONE OF HIS VICTIMS IN HER PREVIOUS INCARNATION!



ALL RIGHT.
JANET BECKER, WE'RE
READY NOW... YOU WERE
TELLING ME OF
PRISCILLA STARKER...

YES... I
WAS PRISCILLA
STARKER... SO LONELY THEN!
MY PARENTS WERE GONE!
I HAD NO ONE TO SPEAK
TO... ONLY KITTY! AND THEY
CALLED ME EVIL...
A WITCH!

"THEY WERE DETERMINED TO
CONDDEMN ME! IT WASN'T A FAIR
TRIAL... I WAS THE FOCUS OF THEIR
IRRATIONAL SUPERSTITIONS...!"

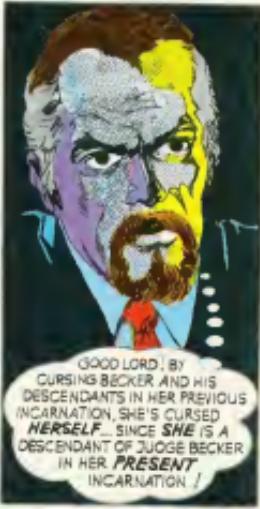
LET IT BE KNOWN THAT
UPON THIS DAY JUDGE
MATTHEW BECKER CONDEMN'S
THIS WITCH TO DEATH AT
THE STAKE! HAVE YE
ANYTHING TO SAY FOR
YOURSELF, WITCH?

YES! IF AS A
WITCH I BE JUDGED
AND CONDEMNED, THEN AS A
WITCH SO SHALL I DIE! I
CURSE YOU JUDGE MATTHEW
BECKER! I CURSE YOU AND
ALL YOUR DESCENDANTS
THROUGHOUT
ETERNITY!

YOU THOUGHT NOTHING OF DESTROYING
MY CAT! SHE PROVIDED ME WITH THE ONLY
COMPANIONSHIP I HAD; BUT YOU KILLED
HER... AND SO I CURSE YOU! AND WHAT
BETTER VEHICLE FOR YOUR DEATH THAN
A WITCH'S FAMILIAR... A CAT! LIKE
AN AVENGING ANGEL, A CAT WILL
CAUSE YOU AND YOUR DESCENDANTS
A SENSELESS, MEANINGLESS
DEATH!

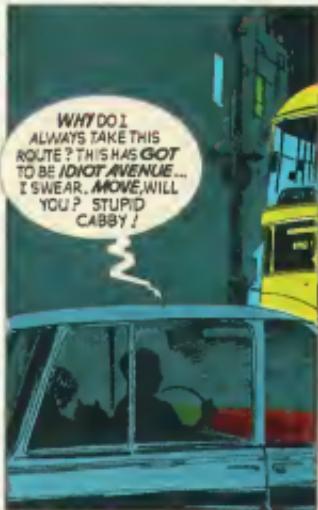


THE AWFUL MEMORIES OF YOUR LIFE AND DEATH AS PRISCILLA STARKER FADE AWAY AS THE GENTLE MONOTONE OF THE DOCTOR'S VOICE CARRIES YOU FORWARD... THROUGH BLURRED DARKNESS... MOVING SO QUICKLY THROUGH TIME.../



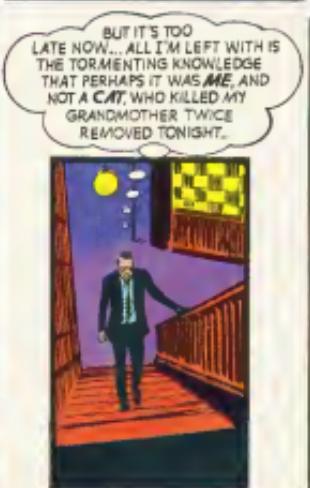


ELSEWHERE...A SMALL CHILD FROLICS IN THE BACK SEAT OF HER FATHER'S CAR...A PERSIAN CAT IN HER LAP...THE WIND BLOWING IN HER FACE.../





EPILOGUE: YOU ARE DEAD,
JOANET BECKER, AND YOU WILL NEVER
APPRECIATE THE EFFORTS OF A
MELANCHOLY HYPNOTIST... A HYPNOTIST
WHO SHUFFLES AWAY FROM YOU
WITH TRAGEDY-LADEN FEET...



END

SAN FRANCISCO, SUMMER, 1944.

N-NOOOoo!
PLEASE...
PLEAEEE--!

CANDIES

FRUITS

THE DEMONS OF

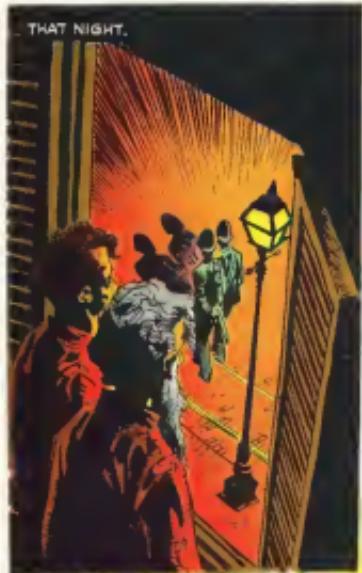
Father
Pain

*Mission Dolores
Orphanage*



THE NEXT DAY, IN A MODEST WHARF FRONT HOTEL ROOM.













THE SPIRIT

WILL EISNER

WHO IS
THE MASKED
MAN
KNOWN ONLY
TO
SOCIETY
AS
THE SPIRIT?
WHO
IS THE
MAN WHO
HAS THWARTED
CRIME
AND CRIMINALS
ALL
THESE YEARS
?
WHO IS HE
AND
HOW DID
HE
COME TO
BE?
THIS IS THE
STORY.

IT WAS LONG PAST
MIDNIGHT ON A HOT,
WET JUNE NIGHT
MANY YEARS AGO...
CENTRAL CITY LAY
CHOKING FOR BREATH
IN AN EERIE FOG...

A LONE FIGURE SPRINTED
THROUGH THE NARROW,
SOGGY WATERFRONT
STREETS THAT WOUND
LIKE GREY VEINS THROUGH
THE FRIGHTENED CITY.
IT WAS PENNY COLT
NOTED CRIMINOLOGIST.
HIS MISSION:
TO SAVE THE
CITY FROM THE
MAD SCIENTIST,
DR. COBRA!

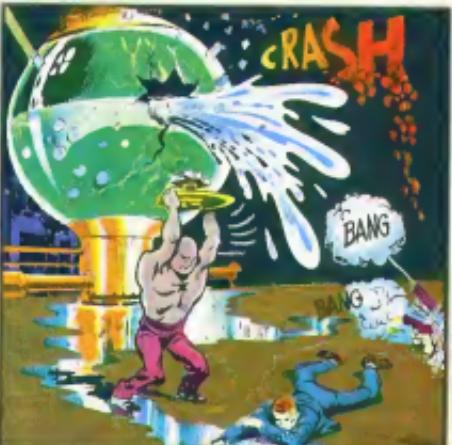
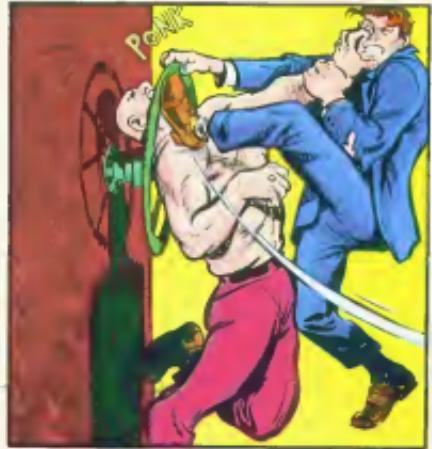


DR. COBRA'S
THREATENS
CENTRAL CITY
WITH DISASTER!

DR. COBRA'S
CITY DESTROYED
THROUGH COBRA'S
DESTRUCTION











POLICE HEADQUARTERS TWO DAYS LATER...



SUPPOSE I WERE TO REMAIN DEAD... WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE UNFINISHED CASES...

A LOT OF CROOKS WOULD RELAX... COME OUT OF HIDING... YOUR CRIME BUSTING ACTIVITIES HAVE KEPT THEM OFF GUARD AND...



SAY... WHY THAT'S A GREAT IDEA... IF YOU STAY DEAD IT'LL BE LIKE CATCHING FISH IN A TANK...

EXACTLY... AND BY WEARING A DISGUISE I COULD OPERATE WITHOUT THE NORMAL RESTRICTIONS...



YOU REALIZE OF COURSE THAT THIS IS VERY IRREGULAR... IF YOU DO ANYTHING TO INTERFERE WITH POLICEWORK I'LL HAVE TO UNMASK YOU AND REVEAL YOUR TRUE IDENTITY...

NATURALLY... I'M GOING TO FIX UP AN UNDER-GROUND HOME AND LAB UNDER WILDWOOD CEMETERY... FROM THERE I CAN OPERATE IN SECRECY!! HERE ARE THE PLANS, NOW I'LL NEED YOUR HELP.



DON'T WORRY... I'LL HELP YOU GET IT SET UP... GULP! GOOD LUCK BOY... OH, WHAT WILL YOU CALL YOURSELF?

THE SPIRIT!!



COMMISSIONER DID I HEAR YOU TALKING... TO SOMEONE...?

ER... NO... HEH HEH JUST TALKING TO MYSELF.



YOU FEELING ALRIGHT, SIR??

MUCH BETTER, MUCH BETTER!



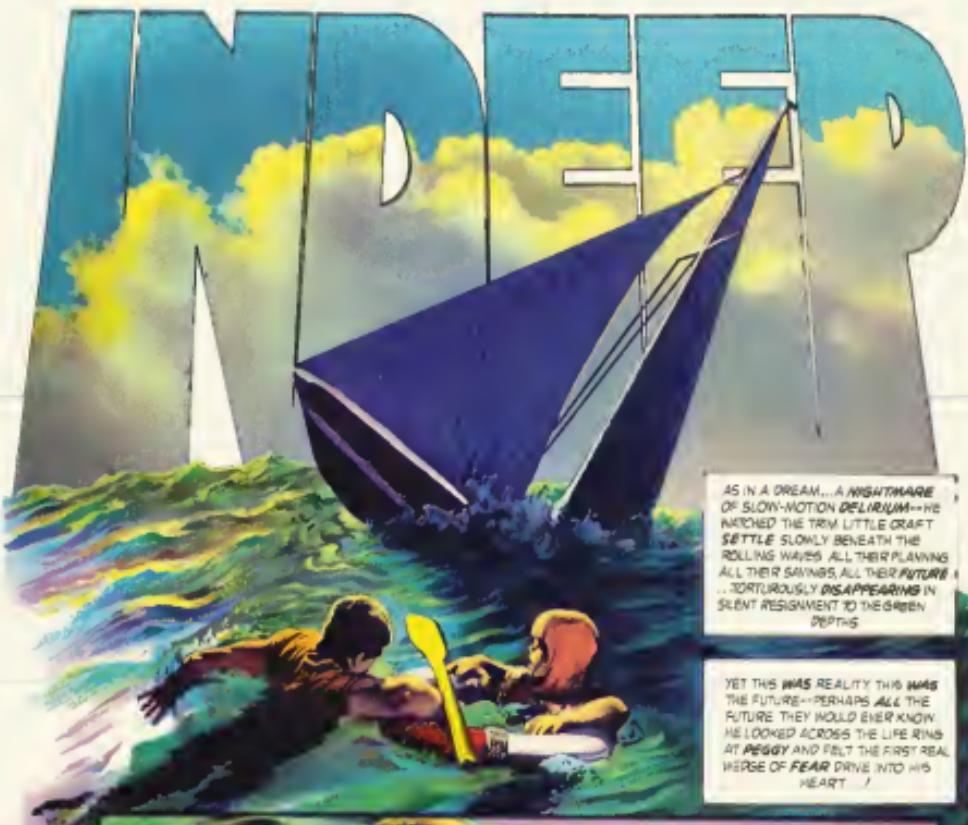
THE SPIRIT

By Will Eisner



I SAW SUCH A BLOW
KILL A MAN IN
KANSAS CITY ONCE.
THE SPIRIT
COMES BACK FOR
MORE.





AS IN A DREAM...A NIGHTMARE OF SLOW-MOTION DELIRIUM--HE WATCHED THE TRIM LITTLE CRAFT SETTLE SLOWLY BEHIND THE ROLLING WAVES. ALL THEIR PLANNING, ALL THEIR SAVINGS, ALL THEIR FUTURE...TORTUREOUSLY DISAPPEARING IN SILENT RESIGNATION TO THE GREEN DEPTHS.

YET THIS WAS REALITY THIS WAS THE FUTURE--PERHAPS ALL THE FUTURE THEY WOULD EVER KNOW. HE LOOKED ACROSS THE LIFE RINGS AT PEGGY AND FELT THE FIRST REAL WEDGE OF FEAR DRIVE INTO HIS HEART.

UNTIL NOW, THERE HADN'T BEEN TIME FOR FEAR--ONLY A SORT OF HEART-RACING URGENCY TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS, GATHER THE RIGHT INFORMATION. BEFORE THE BOAT WAS GONE IN THE END, THERE WAS HARDLY TIME EVEN FOR THAT....!



HANGING HERE NOW, IN THE WARM ROCKING WATER, THERE WAS AT LAST THE CHANCE TO PUT THEIR SITUATION IN PERSPECTIVE...AND THE PERSPECTIVE LINES WERE CLEAR CUT: ENDLESS GREEN SEA BELOW, ENDLESS BLUE SKY ABOVE. THE DREADFUL, MONOTONOUS CERTAINTY OF IT SETTLED OVER HIM.





"THEY'LL FIND US," HE SAID... NOT BELIEVING IT... NOT LETTING THE DISBELIEF SHOW IN HIS VOICE, AND THE SMALL, CALM CONVICTION OF HER REPLY ALMOST BROUGHT TEARS TO HIS EYES IN THE VASTNESS OF THEIR FUTILITY. "OF COURSE THEY WILL..."

HE CAST ABOUT FUTILELY FOR SOME KIND OF SHELTER. THERE WAS NONE. THERE HADN'T BEEN TIME TO GRAB EVEN A BLANKET OR TARP. THE BOAT HAD GONE DOWN LIKE A ROCK. HE CAUGHT HER LOOKING AT HIM... "MY SKIRT," SHE SAID.



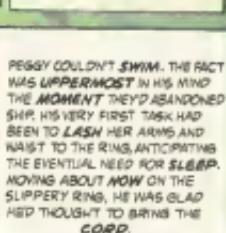
HE LOOKED AT HIS WATCH: 10% THE SUN WOULD BE FULL STRENGTH IN A COUPLE OF HOURS. THAT WOULD BE THEIR FIRST PROBLEM. IF PRUDENT, THE BOTTLE OF GINGER ALE HE'D MANAGED TO GRAB SHOULD LAST THEM TWO OR THREE DAYS. BUT THE SUN.



HE SMILED AT HER AND REALIZED SUDDENLY HOW MUCH WORSE THINGS COULD BE FOR THEM WITHOUT EITHER OF THE OTHER THERE FOR COMPANY. HE MOVED AROUND THE RINGS AND UNWRAPPED THE SKIRT FROM HER WAIST. I LOVE YOU, HE THOUGHT.



LOOPING ONE ARM ABOUT THE RINGS, HE TORE THE GINGHAM MATERIAL IN HALF AND DRAPED PART OF IT OVER HER HEAD AND SHOULDERS—THE OTHER HALF OVER HIS OWN. IT WAS WET AND HEAVY OUT OF THE WATER, BUT WOULD PROTECT THEM FROM THE SUN'S RAYS. HE WONDERED IMMEDIATELY HOW COLD IT WOULD GET AT NIGHT.



PEGGY COULDN'T SWIM. THE FACT WAS UPERMOST IN HIS MIND THE MOMENT THEY'D ABANDONED SHIP. HIS VERY FIRST TASK HAD BEEN TO LASH HER ARMS AND WAIST TO THE RINGS, ANTICIPATING THE EVENTUAL NEED FOR SLEEP. MOVING ABOUT NOW ON THE SLIPPERY RING, HE WAS GLAD HE'D THOUGHT TO BRING THE CORD.



ONE SMALL SWALLOW. IT WAS MADDENING NOT TO GULP IT GREEDILY. HIS HEART WENT OUT TO HER BUT HE RECAPPED THE BOTTLE. HE SCANNED THE HORIZON FOR THE HUNDREDTH TIME FOR SOME SIGN OF A SHIP. FOR THE HUNDREDTH TIME HE SAW ONLY WATER. HIS ARMS ACHED.



HE KNEW THIRST WOULD COME QUICKLY BUT HE'D HOPED NOT AS SOON AS THIS. BY TWO O'CLOCK HE COULD WAIT NO LONGER. PEGGY HADN'T COMPLAINED BUT HE'D CAUGHT HER LICKING HER PALE, DRY LIPS...SAW HER SWALLOWING WITH PAIN. HE DREW UP THE GINGER ALE...!



THEY TOLD STORIES, JOKES, RIDDLES... LAUGHED ABOUT URINATING IN THEIR CLOTHES. HE RESOAKED THE SKIRT HALVES SEVERAL TIMES AND UNLINED HER OFTEN TO KEEP HER BLOOD CIRCULATING. THEY WAITED. THE SUN DIPPED TOWARD THE SEA. THEY SIPPED MORE GINGER ALE. THEY WAITED. HUNGER JABBED AT THEM MORE FREQUENTLY. THEY WAITED.

NIGHT HE HAD NEVER SEEN SO MANY STARS. BLESSEDLY THE WATER REMAINED WARM. THEY TALKED LITTLE. IT MADE THEM THIRSTY. SHE HUMMED "MOON RIVER." THE RING ROCKED... ROCKED. HE CAUGHT HIMSELF MORDING HE BIT HIS LIP TO STAY AWAKE. SHE SMILED TIREDLY.

THEY COUNTED SHOOTING STARS. THOUGHT ABOUT THE VASTNESS OF THE HEAVENS. IT WAS COMFORTING TO LOOK STRAIGHT UP AND SEE ANYTHING BUT STARS... SOMETHING YOU COULD DO ON YOUR OWN BACK PORCH. THEY THOUGHT OF HOME. HER HEAD BOBBED REPEATEDLY. HE WATCHED SMILING AS SHE GAVE IN TO SLEEP.



HE HADN'T PRAYED SINCE HE WAS TEN. HE DID SO NOW WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT. THEN HE WATCHED HER A LONG WHILE. SHE LOOKED LIKE A LOST LITTLE GIRL. I'M SORRY, PEGGY HE THOUGHT... KNOWING IT WASN'T HIS FAULT BUT UNABLE TO HELP THINKING IT. THE RING ROCKED... HE COULDN'T REMEMBER DOZING OFF...!

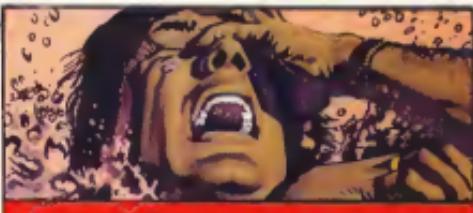




HIS HEAD JERKED UP ABRUPTLY SENDING A LANCE OF PAIN UP HIS NECK. BRIGHT GLARE ASSAULTED HIS RED EYES. MEMORY RETURNED INSTANTLY... CRYSTAL SHARP HE SQUINTED ACROSS THE RING AT HIS WIFE. HIS HEART LEAPED. HER FACE WAS IN THE WATER!



HE SQUEEZED HER CHEST IN A FRENZY, PUFFED AIR INTO HER MOUTH. THERE WAS NO PROPER WAY TO GIVE RESUSCITATION. HE TORE AT HIS HAIR SCREAMED UNTIL HIS THROAT BURNED RAW. HE COULD NOT LIVE. HE BENT TO HER DEEP BREATH. HE COULD NOT LIVE. HE BENT TO HER DEEP BREATH.



HE COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO LET HER FREE. HE WOULD SEE THAT SHE WAS BURIED PROPERLY ON SHORE OR DIE WITH HER. HE CRIED FOR HOURS, KNOWING EVEN IN HIS AGONY THAT IT WAS A MISTAKE. HE WAS LOSING PRECIOUS MOISTURE. I'LL DROWN MYSELF, HE THOUGHT BUT HE DIDN'T.

HE SLIPPED INTO A KIND OF DELIRIUM. HE KEPT IMAGINING HIMSELF LETTING LOOSE ON THE RING, SINKING QUIETLY INTO THE LIGHT GREEN, THEN DARKER GREEN, THEN PURPLE DEPTHS. GENTLY, PEACEFULLY HE BLINKED OPEN HIS EYES AND FOUND HIMSELF STILL CLUTCHING IT SOMEHOW. PEGGY STARING AT HIM WITH FULL, LOST EYES.

HE BECAME DEAD INSIDE. HE HARDLY NOTICED THE ACHE IN HIS ARMS. IN HIS STOMACH. THE ROCKING RINGS MESMERIZED HIM, BUT HE GREW THIRSTY AT NOON AND HAULED UP THE GINGER ALE TO HIS SNAKE. HE FOUND HIMSELF THINKING HER LAST, TWICE AS LONG NOW... AND THEN NOT CARING.

ONCE HE LOOKED UP FROM HIS STUPOR TO SEE A SKULL PERCHED ON HIS WIFE'S HEAD. HIS MOUTH DROPPED OPEN AND HE HUNG THERE STIRING IDIOTICALLY AT IT. THEN HE NOTICED ONE OF PEGGY'S EYES WAS MISSING AND THE DARK STAIN ON THE GULL'S BEAK. HE SCREAMED HOARSELY AND IT FLEW AWAY.

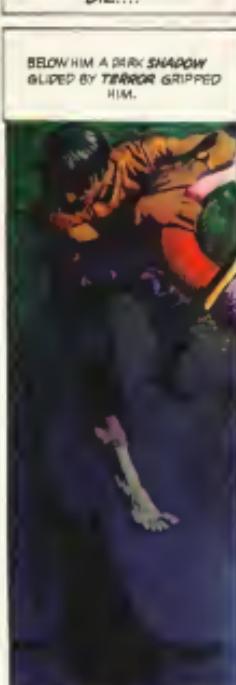




HE WAS HALF-ASLEEP IN LATE AFTERNOON WHEN THE RING JERKED VIOLENTLY. ONCE HE LOOKED UP DAZEDLY TRYING TO ORGANIZE HIS THOUGHTS. HAD THEY AINT SOMETHING 'A ROCK'? SHORE? HE GAZED ABOUT. THE OCEAN WAS PLACID.



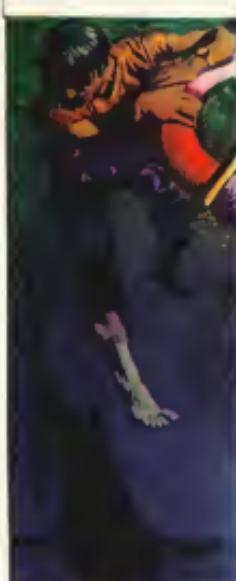
THEN THE RING PULLED HIM UNDER...



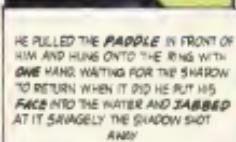
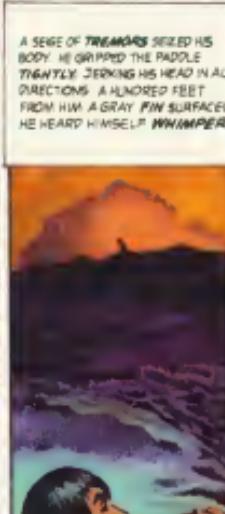
LATER HE REALIZED IT WAS A STUPID THING TO DO. HE COULD HAVE EATEN THE GULL CAREFULLY. HE ARRANGED THE PADDLE IN FRONT OF HIM AND WAITED FOR ANOTHER BIRD. NONE CAME. HE LICKED HIS LIPS. I DON'T CARE ANYWAY... I'M GOING TO DIE...!



HE BOBBED BACK UP, CHOKING WITH WATER STILL HOLDING THE RING. WHAT WAS HAPPENING?



BELOW HIM A DARK SHADOW GLIDED BY TERROR GRIPPED HIM.



HE PULLED THE PADDLE IN FRONT OF HIM AND HUNG ONTO THE RING WITH ONE HAND. WAITING FOR THE SHADOW TO RETURN. WHEN IT DID HE PUT HIS FACE INTO THE WATER AND JABBED AT IT SAVAGELY. THE SHADOW SHOT AWAY.



A DOZEN FEET FROM HIM THE FIN DISAPPEARED. HE OPENED HIS EYES. UNDER THE STINGING SALT WATER AND JABBED AT THE SLEEK BLUR WITH THE PADDLE. HE MISSED. THE RING PULLED HIM UNDER.

HE SURFACED COUGHING AND SWALLOWING AND SPITTING UP BALE. HE JERKED THE PADDLE ABOUT, SEARCHING WITH TEAR-FILLED EYES.



THE SHADOW LOOMED BEHIND HIM. HE WAITED THIS TIME... WAITED UNTIL THE PINK OPENING APPEARED. THEN HE JAMMED DOWN HARD. THE PADDLE STRUCK SOMETHING.



HE PULLED THE PADDLE UP. THE SMOOTH WOOD ENDED IN A JAGGED STUMP. HE WIPED AT HIS EYES AND STARED BENEATH THE SURFACE. THE SHARK WAS GONE--AS PEGGY'S LEGS JUST BELOW THE KNEE. HE SCREAMED HIS FRUSTRATION WAITING FOR THE SHARK TO RETURN. IT DIDN'T.



SUNSET SHIT THE ENTIRE SKY UPRE. SOMEWHERE HIS BRAIN REGISTERED ITS BEAUTY BUT HE DIDN'T FEEL IT. THE RING ROCKED CEASELESSLY. I HAVEN'T EATEN IN TWO DAYS, HE THOUGHT... I'M DYING. IT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE NOW THAT HE'D EVER EATEN. HE CLOSED HIS EYES AND SAW PEGGY ON THE BOY ON THEIR YACHT...



HE HUGGED THE ROCKING RING IN HIS ARMS AND THE RING BECAME PEGGY ROCKING HIM AGAINST HER BREAST, RUNNING HER AWNS THROUGH HIS HAIR, ASKING HIM WHAT HE'D LIKE FOR DINNER...



"I WANT YOU FOR DINNER," HE SAID AND SHE WAGGED A FINGER AT HIM IN MOCK REPROACHMENT AND HE TOOK THE FINGER AND KISSED IT AND HER PALM AND HER CHEEK AND HER LIPS... SOFT AND WARM AND SWEET. HE SAID, "LET'S SKIP DINNER..."

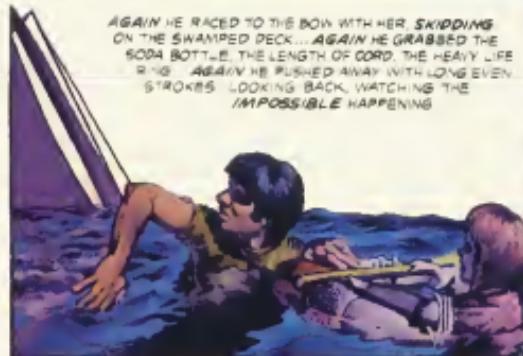


THEY HELD EACH OTHER IN THE DARK CABIN AND SHE LOOKED UP AT HIM WITH HER LITTLE GIRL'S EYES AND PLACED HIS HAND AGAINST HER BREAST AND SAID, "FEEL MY HEART?... IT'S BEATING JUST FOR YOU... WHATEVER HAPPENS, DON'T LET ANYBODY OR ANYTHING TAKE IT FROM YOU..."

HE FELT THE SHIP SHUDDER ABRUPTLY BEHIND THEM... SAW THE SUDDEN LOOK OF FEAR IN PEGGY'S EYES. HE KNEW AGAIN THE AGONY OF RUNNING BELOW DECK, THE SHOCK OF FEELING SALT WATER LIP ABOUT HIS ANKLES...



AGAIN HE RACED TO THE BOAT WITH HER, SKIPPING ON THE SWAMPED DECK... AGAIN HE GRABBED THE SOFA BOTTLE, THE LENGTH OF CORD, THE HEAVY LIFE RING. AGAIN HE PUSHED AWAY WITH LONG EVEN STROKES, LOOKING BACK, WATCHING THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENING.



HE GRABBED UP THE PADDLE, LOOKING DOWN AS HE DID SO, HIS SKIN GREW TIGHT. THE SEA WAS ALIVE WITH SHARKS...



AN ENORMOUS BLUE SHAPE BRUSHED PAST HIS LEG. THE RING JERKED, JARRING HIS TEETH. HE STRUCK OUT WITH THE BROKEN PADDLE. THE WATER THRASHED, FOAMED. ANOTHER SHAPE RUSHED UP BEHIND HIM, THE RING SHUDDERED, TORE FROM HIS GRASP...



A MIND-PIERCING SCREECH BROKE HIS REVERIE. HE JOLTED UP, EYES FIXING CONFUSedly ON HIS WIFE'S CORPSE... AS IF SHE MIGHT SUPPLY ANSWERS. HIS STOMACH TWISTED, HER FACE WAS HALF-GONE. THE SKY WAS FILLED WITH GULLS...



HE LURCHED THROUGH THE WATER, GASPING... CAUGHT THE RING JUST AS IT JERKED AGAIN VIOLENTLY. HE CRIED OUT... HIS VOICE LIKE A DRY RATTLE. HIS WIFE'S BODY BOBBED AND JUMPED, ARMS FLOPPING IN MUTE PROTEST. THEY WERE BUTCHERING HER...

HE STRUCK DOWNWARD WITH THE PADDLE AGAIN AND AGAIN SCREAMING AT THEM. THE SEA TURNED TO WHITE FOAM AROUND HIM. THEN AGAIN THE PADDLE WAS WRENCHED FROM HIS HANDS. HE FOUND IT FLOATING NEARBY... HE TRIED IT... JABBED AGAIN...



THE MOMENT HE PAUSED TO CATCH HIS BREATH THE GULLS RETURNED. HE TRIED TO YELL BUT HIS VOICE WOULDN'T WORK ANYMORE. HE WAVED HIS ARMS WEAKLY BUT THEY ONLY RUFFLED THEIR FEATHERS AND CONTINUED THEIR GREEDY PLUCKING...



THE RING JERKED AND THEY FLEW OFF SCREECHING THE DARK SHAPES FLEW BACK. HE JABBED OUT WEAKLY WITH THE PADDLE. HE SAW THE CORD LOOSEN AROUND HIS WIFE'S WAIST... SAW HER BEGIN SLIPPING DOWNWARD INTO THE WATER. HE MOANED... GRABBED FOR HER...



THE SHARKS MOVED OFF MOMENTARILY. HE HUNG IN THE WATER EXHAUSTED CHEST HEAVING. THEN HE SCREAMED AGAIN HIS WIFE WAS COVERED WITH GULLS. HE LIFTED THE PADDLE WITH LEADEN ARMS AND SWUNG WILDLY AT THEM...



HE HELD HER CLOSE AS THE GULLS SETTLED OVER THEM AND THE DARK SHAPES JERKED CONVULSIVELY AT THEM IN THE THRASHING, SPRAY-FLECKED SEA. HE CLOSED HIS EYES AND PEGGY RAN HER FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR. AND CROONED 'MOON RIVER' TO HIM AND HE THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT HE WANTED FOR DINNER...



THREE HOURS LATER HE WAS CLINGING ONLY TO THE LIFE RING WHEN THE SILVER SHAPES APPEARED ON THE HORIZON, SWIMMING TOWARD HIM



EPILOGUE



END

DON'T MISS AN ISSUE OF...



CREEPY **EERIE** **VAMPIRELLA**



WARREN'S TRIPLE-THREAT TRIO!